

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY LIMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4727

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 3053

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PE

SUBJ: PRESIDENT VELASCO BOUNCES BACK

1. APPARENTLY CONTRADICTING RUMORS THAT HE HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY ILL AND PARTIALLY PARALYZED, PRESIDENT VELASCO MET ON APRIL 11 WITH HIS CABINET AND THE PRESS. IN A BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH NEWS-MEN, HE REPORTEDLY APPEARED "VIGOROUS, SUN-TANNED AND REJUVENATED" AFTER HIS REST AT THE SEASIDE RESORT OF PARACAS. VELASCO ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD RETURN TO HIS NORMAL DUTIES IN LIMA ON APRIL 14.

2. EXCEPT FOR A CAREFULLY CONTROLLED 90-MINUTE SESSION WITH UN SECRETARY GENERAL WALDHEIM ON MARCH 14 (LIMA 2113), VELASCO HAD BEEN ABSENT FROM THE PUBLIC EYE SINCE FEBRUARY 28 WHEN HE SUFFERED WHAT IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN A MILD STROKE. HOWEVER, THE GOP ACKNOWLEDGED ONLY THAT VELASCO HAD SUFFERED FROM HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE. THIS LED TO A STRICT CURTAILMENT OF VELASCO'S ACTIVITIES AND TO WIDESPREAD RUMORS THAT HE WAS NEAR DEATH AND THAT PRIME MINISTER MORALES BERMUDEZ WOULD BE GRANTED SPECIAL POWERS. THE HERMETIC PERUVIAN MILITARY GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO COMMENT ON THE STATE OF VELASCO'S HEALTH AND THE CABINET DID NOT MEET BETWEEN MARCH 18 AND APRIL 11.

3. ON THE ELEVENTH, ACCORDING TO THE GOP-OWNED CRONICIA, VELASCO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD BEEN "SICK" BUT LITTLE MORE; HE MENTIONED THE NAMES OF TWO OF HIS DOCTORS: MOLINA (A HEART SPECIALIST)

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TIONED THE NAMES OF TWO OF HIS DOCTORS: MOLINA (A HEART SPECIALIST)

IST) AND ESKENAZI (A NEUROSURGEON). HE WAS PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF ONE NEWSPAPER WHICH SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN SAILING ON A YACHT AND EATING LOCAL DELICACIES CONTRARY TO HIS DIET. LATER, THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS SECRETARY ZIMMERMANN SPELED OUT WHO VELASCO MEANT BY NAMING THE NEWSPAPER, ULTIMA HORA, AND ITS DIRECTOR, ISMAEL FRIAS, ACCUSING HIM OF TRYING TO "INFILTRATE" (THAT IS, TO UDERMINE) THE REVOLUTION.

4. COMMENT: JUDGING BY PHOTOGRAPHS WHICH APPEARED IN THE PRESS, VELASCO LOOKED SOMEWHAT THINNER BUT QUITE ALERT. HE GESTICULATED WITH HIS ARMS AND EVEN REPORTEDLY FLEXED HIS MUSCLES FOR REPORTERS. NATURALLY, NONE OF THE NEWSMEN WHO WENT TO PARACAS WAS ABOUT TO WRITE A CRITICAL STORY ABOUT VELASCO FOR PERU'S PRO-GOVERNMENT PRESS. EVEN SO, VELASCO APPEARED TO HAVE MADE ANOTHER COMEBACK FROM ILLNESS.

5. FURTHERMORE, THERE WAS NO HINT WHATSOEVER THAT VELASCO WAS ABOUT TO DELEGATE ANY OF HIS POWERS TO THE PRIME MINISTER. SUCH A DELEGATION HAD BEEN RUMORED AS A PRINCIPAL TOPIC OF DISCUSSION FOR THE APRIL 11 CABINET SESSION. WITH ADVANCED ARTERIOSCLEROSIS, VELASCO IS NOT WELL BUT IS APPARENTLY DETERMINED NOT TO LET HIMSELF BE COUNTED OUT.
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